

A note from Pastor Elisabeth Pynn Himmelman

A new year always arrives carrying a mixture of emotions: hope and weariness; gratitude and grief; anticipation and uncertainty. We turn the calendar, but we also carry forward all that the last year has shaped in us and around us.

As people of faith, we don't step into a new year pretending everything is new or easy. Instead, we step forward grounded in the promise that God is already at work—calling, healing, transforming, and renewing.

Scripture reminds us that hope is not wishful thinking. Biblical hope is sturdy, born of trust that God is present even in the hardest places. The prophet Micah's words, "what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8) remind us that justice and hope belong together.

Hope without justice becomes passive optimism.
Justice without hope is brittle.

But when they are held together—when we trust that God's kin-dom is breaking in—we find the courage to act with compassion, to tell the truth, and to show up for our neighbors with humility and love.

This congregation has embodied that kind of hope in so many ways: through acts of generosity, through quiet faithfulness, through showing up when it would have been easier to turn away. You have chosen to care for children and families, to feed neighbors with dignity, to build relationships across difference, to ask hard questions about how our faith shapes our whole lives.

As we begin this year, my prayer is not that it will be easy, but that it will be faithful.

Faithful in listening—to God and to one another.
Faithful in courage—especially when love asks more of us than comfort would prefer.
Faithful in hope—that steady confidence that the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

In the weeks ahead, we will continue with our theme of "Life Together" as we worship, learn, serve, and dream together. We will celebrate joy and tend to sorrow. We will practice justice not as an abstract idea, but as a way of loving our neighbors well. And we will do so trusting that God walks with us into every unknown.

Thank you for being a community where hope takes root and justice finds expression—not perfectly, but faithfully.
Happy new year!



Anniversaries over 40 years:

Darlene Chuckray
Ray & Karen Tutton

Birthdays 80 years +

Judy Beskid
Bob Carrington
Hannelore Duenkel
Jan Dusek
Tom Dusek
Anita Gass
Barbara Hiner
Morton Hyatt
Ronald Jepsen
Lee Marek
Wanda Rehak-Cowin
Logan Wasson

OSLC Library Corner



Red Bird

Red bird came all winter
Firing up the landscape
As nothing else could.
Of course I love the sparrows,
Those dun-colored darlings,



So hungry and so
many.
I am a God-fearing
feeder of birds,
I know he has many
children,
Not all of them bold in
spirit.
Still, for whatever
reason-
Perhaps because the
winter is so long
And the sky so black-
blue,
Or perhaps because
the heart narrows
As often as it opens-
I am grateful
That red bird comes all
winter
Firing up the landscape
As nothing else can do.

Mary Oliver

Renewed by Grace: Growing in Whole Wellness This New Year

By Alexandra Colaianni

As we move into a new season together, many of us feel the quiet invitation to pause, release, and begin again. At our **Renewed by Grace** gathering on New Years Eve, we named what no longer serves us and gently made space for what God longs to grow in us. This same spirit of grace can guide how we care for our whole selves in the months ahead.

Whole wellness reminds us that we are beautifully complex—mind, body, spirit, relationships, work, and environment all woven together. Rather than striving for perfection, we are invited into wholeness, shaped by grace and sustained by God's steady presence.



The 8 dimensions of wellness offer a helpful lens for this journey:

- *Spiritual – nurturing connection to God, meaning, and purpose*
- *Emotional – honoring our feelings with compassion and honesty*
- *Physical – caring for our bodies as gifts*
- *Social – cultivating life-giving relationships and community*
- *Intellectual – remaining curious, reflective, and open to growth*
- *Vocational – finding purpose in our work and daily callings*
- *Environmental – tending the spaces that hold our lives*
- *Financial – practicing stewardship, trust, and balance*

Rather than trying to “fix everything,” God invites us to start small and faithful. One gentle practice that can help is setting **SMART goals** — goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. When held with grace, SMART goals become less about pressure and more about intention.

For example:

- Spiritual wellness: *"I will spend five minutes in quiet prayer or reflection three mornings a week for the next month."*
- Physical wellness: *"I will take a 10-minute walk after dinner on weekdays."*
- Social wellness: *"I will reach out to one person each week to deepen connection."*

These small, realistic commitments help us move forward without losing sight of grace. They leave room for God's presence to meet us exactly where we are.

Reflective Questions

Consider using these for personal reflection, family conversation, or small groups.

- Which dimension of wellness feels most tender or in need of care right now?
- What is something I may need to release in order to make space for renewal?
- Where have I already noticed God's grace supporting my well-being?
- What is one small, SMART step I feel invited to take this season?

Scripture reminds us, ***"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness"*** (2 Corinthians 12:9). Our wellness journeys are not solo projects—they unfold within community, prayer, and the ongoing gift of grace.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, We come to you just as we are—tired and hopeful, grateful and longing for renewal. Thank you for meeting us with grace, not demands.

Help us release what no longer serves us and gently receive what brings life and wholeness.

Guide us as we care for our whole selves—body, mind, spirit, and community. Give us wisdom to take small, faithful steps and trust that you are at work in each one

Renew us by your grace, and lead us into deeper peace, connection, and joy. Amen.

Season of Sharing Updates

The most astonishing result this Season Sharing was the donation of over 6,000 rolls of toilet paper – shared with needy families at Loaves and Fishes. But how did we get here? What is the history of the Season of Sharing (SoS) and how is it growing and changing along with our congregation?

SoS started about 30+ years ago as a food drive supported by congregants who gathered food and drove it down to a Lutheran church in Chicago. Sandy Martinich was deeply involved in that initial effort. As that Chicago church closed, Nancy Couch suggested we focus our food-drive efforts closer to home and support Loaves and Fishes. What started as a food drive morphed into an effort to obtain paper products not provided by government programs – for us, that's toilet paper.

Over the last 15-plus years, the toilet paper drive has been complemented by the placement of Christmas trees in our entryways. Each tree contains ornaments representing the needs of our local missions. Congregants are encouraged to take an ornament, buy a gift card, bring a book, or otherwise directly support our mission activities.

But this year has been different. Normally, our paper drive yielded about 1,500 rolls. This year, 6,000 rolls appeared. We think there are several reasons for this. Economic and political conditions have



driven a level of need that surpasses anything we've seen in recent history. This need is real, pressing and desperate. Secondly, our improved social media skills keep those needs squarely in our awareness so we can take meaningful action. Finally, the clarification of our Welcome Statement serves as a North Star for our congregational activities. It is not just "nice words" – it is who we are, why we are, and what we are about as a congregation.



What a tree-mendous outpouring of generosity by OSLC members this year. The ornaments on the trees at the Our Saviours and Celebration campuses were taken so quickly by the Wednesday groups and Saturday service attendees that those who organized the trees had to quickly replenish them, so the Sunday service attendees had ornaments to take too. What a great problem to have! 😊

Last year, OSLC members donated \$4,400 in gifts and 162 gift cards. This year, we donated \$5,125 and 206 gift cards, along with more than 200 elementary level books! The money was divided amongst several ministries to provide support to those in need.

- Holy Family school received 92 gift cards and 180 new hard and soft covered books .
- Loaves & Fishes received 82 gift cards to Meijer specifically for moms with babies trying to afford powder formula (which costs about \$22-\$26 for each can).
- LSSI received 19 gift cards to Walmart.
- The Refugee ministry received 25 VISA cards.

Thank you to everyone who created the ornaments and met with ministry groups to determine the needs for this year. And, of course, thank you to everyone who donated to this year's Season of Sharing.



Hi church! If we haven't had the pleasure of meeting yet, I'd love to introduce myself. My name is Tracy Jackway, and I've been offered the opportunity to serve as Our Saviour's new Communications Manager.

My family and I have been part of Our Saviour's since 2011. My wife, Terese, serves on the Council, and our two boys, Elijah and Aaron, have called this their church home since they were four years old. Although we attended for many years and were involved in a range of activities and ministries, it wasn't until I became actively engaged in Just Love and the RIC process that I truly fell in love with this deeply caring and committed church community.

Before stepping into this role, I spent over 25 years as an educator—working in public schools, a therapeutic day school, and as a homeschool educator for our children. When the Communications Manager position opened, I felt a strong nudge (or perhaps a gentle push!) from the Holy Spirit to explore whether I might be a good fit.

In the short time I've been in this position, I've already learned a great deal and am incredibly grateful for the guidance and support of our church leadership and staff. I feel genuinely surrounded by grace and kindness every single day.

My hope in this role is not only to provide weekly communication, but to build relationships and highlight the many mission and ministry areas that make Our Saviour's such a vibrant church. The love, faith, and dedication you pour into this community strengthen and inspire me daily.

Dear Church,

You may have noticed that as the new church year began in Advent, we started using the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue) in worship rather than the Inclusive Bible. This change was

intentional by the pastoral team as part of the ongoing work of studying, interpreting, and wrestling with scripture.

While the ELCA does not require congregations to use a particular Bible translation, the NRSVue has become the standard across our denomination and among many mainline Protestant churches. Its widespread use makes it especially accessible for theological study and aligns closely with the worship resources we use together each week, including bulletins, slides, and lectionary-based materials.

At the same time, there are some practical considerations. The Inclusive Bible is currently out of print and unavailable online, and it does not have the same breadth of scholarly commentaries the pastors regularly rely on for sermon preparation and biblical study. The NRSVue, by contrast, is supported by extensive scholarship and is deeply embedded in the resources that support our shared worship life.

Our use of the NRSVue does not lessen our commitment to inclusive language or to honoring the full humanity and belovedness of all people.

These commitments remain central to who we are as a congregation. The Inclusive Bible continues to be a meaningful resource for study, reflection, and worship planning, and we value the way it invites important conversations about gender, pronouns, and the expansive love of God.

Looking ahead, our hope is to plan further in advance in the church year so we can more intentionally engage questions of language within the appointed scripture readings, holding together faithfulness to the biblical text and care for the people gathered around it.

Our choice to use the NRSVue in worship at this time is not a rejection of the values named in our welcome statement. Rather, it is a decision shaped by careful scholarship, denominational practice, and the shared texts that unite us in public worship.

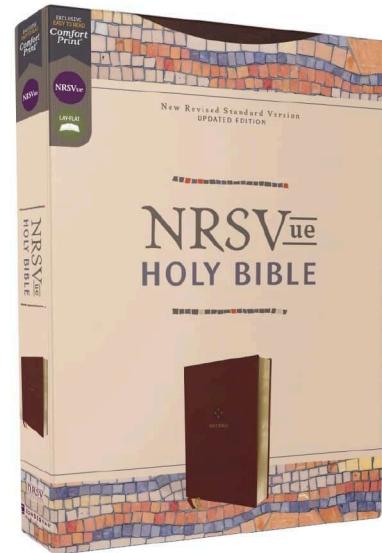
Thank you for being a community that asks thoughtful questions and engages Scripture with openness and care. We are always glad to continue these conversations together as we listen for God's Word among us!

Grace and peace,

Pastor Brian Wise

Pastor Elisabeth Lynn Himmelman

Pastor Ben Sloss



Mission Committee Update

Missions and service are critical values held by OSLC. Since our founding, individuals have spearheaded multiple global and local missions. We also developed a Mission committee to foster communication and planning between our various mission activities.

Since last fall, the mission committee has quietly reorganized with a set of new members. Graham Brenna, who has served as Chair, will be rotating off. Current members are: B.J. Okel, Cathy Cayer, Warren McKinney, Mark Tucker, Cindy Novak and Greg Jepson. Marcus Ewald will serve as Treasurer. Pr. Brian Wise is serving as chair until committee membership is settled and a new chair volunteers. The committee has room for one or two more members. If you are interested, please reach out to Pr. Brian.

For some years, mission funds have been allocated at 10% of giving to the OSLC operating budget. So, allocations directly fluctuate with giving. Five percent goes to the Chicagoland Synod and 5% gets allocated over our various mission activities based on historic allocations and current need. Individual fund-raising efforts also occur (e.g., pies for Mozambique). Proceeds from, the MEGA garage sale make significant additional contributions.

It has been over a decade since the Mission committee Charter and Charge documents were created, so the Committee will be reviewing and revising these documents. It is particularly important to align our mission philosophy with our new Welcome statement. At our core, OSLC: helps feed people, supports schools and meets the material and life-skill needs of "the whole person" (body, mind and spirit). This may result in some "tweaking" of our engagement or support – e.g., our greater support this winter for Loaves and Fishes. It may also result in a marginally greater focus on local mission activities in response to our immediate economic and political environment. All these concerns will be evaluated by the Committee as they move forward and develop a budget for 2026. To that end, it is anticipated that a meeting of the current mission leaders will take place sometime in Spring of 2026 as budget planning begins.

As the Committee gears back up to full capacity, it is important to remember that missions and service are core to our identity at OSLC and represents the heart of the Gospel. Through them, we become the hands, feet and example of the Kingdom of God as we seek to "Know Jesus, and make Jesus known."

**Our Saviour's Lutheran
Church**
oursaviours.com



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